



Memorandum to the IESP Workshop

Sustainability Post-Corona. Stronger commitment and responsible dynamics are needed!

18. – 20. October 2021, Bad Wörishofen

Preamble

Since 2020, the global COVID-19 crisis has been exposing numerous shortcomings in society and the global economy. In Germany, for example, archaic work structures prevail in parts of the food industry; other industry sectors blame COVID-19 for their long standing crises, thereby deliberately diverting attention from existing structural deficits and missed opportunities. Now is the time to examine and expose (mis)developments in order to understand the current global situation. A collective desire for attuned development goals and social (value) orientation has become evident. Quality of life is challenging monetary wealth as the sole indicator of prosperity and individual satisfaction. Today, people accept change, if it secures health, promotes new working environments, and achieves climate goals. Consequently, the “old” growth paradigm, based on maximizing individual benefit, is ready to be replaced by a new paradigm that maximizes societal benefit. Solidary action paves the way towards sustainability.

Not to learn from a crisis is not to understand the crisis! Corona offers us an opportunity to rethink and reset. Can we utilize the pandemic experiences to increase dynamics in realizing the 17 UN-Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), or ensure that we achieve them at all? We, a group of 26 experts from society, science, and politics discussed this issue in a three-day workshop in October 2021. We consider the following six jointly developed demands essential steps to leave behind a world worth living in.

Postulations

1. **Non-sustainable practices and products** must be penalized not subsidized – which has often been the case in recent years. This is particularly true for the agricultural and food sectors. Here, **subsidies** must be targeted to promote biodiversity, animal welfare, and to improve ecosystem services.
2. **Sustainable ecosystem services** require new and innovative strategies for the use of **land resources**. In the interest of climate and Nature, all remaining untouched and pristine ecosystems must be excluded categorically from future use; in sensitive areas agricultural land must be reallocated to uses that benefit Nature; reclaimed land must be dedicated for biodiversity protection and reconnecting habitats. Local – regional – global!
3. In the **financial markets**, flexible and rapidly **effective alternatives** to the slow conventional models are required, such as parallel financing. These must be continuously developed and applied to finance the necessary measures for a timely, global implementation of the SDGs. In public administration, reassessments of the responsible departments and their resources are in order.
4. **Unsustainable conventional structures of thought and action** must be overcome in both the public sector and the economy, utilizing modern, digital and participatory methods as well as cooperation. Where ever appropriate, upcoming actions and measures must be mapped digitally and evaluated as a digital twin.
5. **Trade and supply chains** must become transparent and sustainable. Not only concerning human rights but also pertaining to the common goods in Nature and the environment. The origin of products must be made recognizable and traceable. Social movements demanding such change must be strengthened.
6. **Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)** must be anchored structurally and thematically across all areas of education. This integration encompasses legal requirements as well as any course of study and (vocational) training; training and continuing education of multipliers; supporting subjects, representatives, and networks; as well as a Whole Institution Approach (WIA) in educational institutions.

Explanatory Notes

1. According to common practice, subsidies strategically promote individual services and the manufacturing of products. Particularly affected are agriculture and food production, as well as broad sectors of the manufacturing industry and energy production. According to data provided by the German Federal Environment Agency, national energy production (including lignite mining) received up to 20 billion euros in 2012 and the transport sector around 27 billion euros (tax breaks for diesel fuel, waiver of kerosene taxation, etc.). Some of these payments are considered “environmentally harmful subsidies”, as they allow the polluting parties burden part of their costs on state, society and the individual. This means in effect that costs for pollution during production, trade and consumption are externalized, while profits are still privatized. The agriculture and forestry sector is a key area for the overall transformation to sustainability. More than any other economic sector, it utilizes ecosystem services (ESS) provided by Nature for its own ends. Over the decades, a subsidy culture has developed, founded on the planned social contract for food security and only marginally oriented towards attaining the SDGs. Radical changes are necessary to fulfill this social contract and adhere to the German constitution, which underlines that property ownership goes hand in hand with individual and social responsibility. Consequently, landowners and land users should not be subsidized for the non-sustainable use of the resource entrusted to them, but rather to be held responsible for it.

2. Humanity depends on a variety of ecosystem services, including the provision of usable irrigation and drinking water, clean air, or the pollination of crops. ESS are commonly not reflected in the prices of products and services. We act as if water, air, and life were available for free and waste them accordingly. We need to foster the understanding that “ecosystem services” is a human-defined term reflecting our use of natural resources. The term implies that Nature is self-evidently and unlimitedly available to humans. In the Judeo-Christian cultural sphere, this manifests in a formalized responsibility for the environment, which has increasingly fallen by the wayside as the Anthropocene progresses. Unsustainable use of land resources and practices are harmful to biodiversity - the basis of all ecosystem services - prevail. As a result, quality and quantity of almost all ESS are deteriorating drastically. A development that will further intensify and accelerate as the climate changes. It is therefore necessary that hitherto pristine ecosystems such as the Amazon primary rain forests or the primary forests of Russia – which themselves play a crucial role in mitigating the climate crisis – are categorically excluded from any kind of use. Only then can their functionality be secured. On a global level, all opportunities must be taken to enable agriculture, as the world’s largest influencing force on Nature, to produce as much high-quality food as possible in a sustainable manner that relies on as few ecosystem services as possible. The global potential of smart, sustainable

agriculture is sufficient to feed humanity today and in the future, even with a substantially reduced acreage. We should consistently expand these possibilities, as well as the tremendous opportunities offered by an ESS-efficient replacement of conventional meat products (novel meat replacement/cultured meat). This will allow us to return valuable areas to Nature that are currently alienated from biodiversity conservation by inefficient agriculture. In addition, significantly more land must be made available at the local level, where the protection and conservation of biodiversity has clear priority over agricultural use. This applies in particular to sensitive key areas such as rivers and lakes, springs, wetlands and peatlands, riparian margins and forests. Various areas in cities can make an equally important contribution here. Only if every option at our disposal is used, can the ecosystem services necessary for agriculture, such as maintaining soil fertility or providing groundwater, be preserved. In this context, the creation of a biotope network must be promoted more strongly and quickly, since reconnecting habitats is an important prerequisite for functional ecosystems.

3. To implement the SDGs globally and in time, flexible and rapid alternatives to the slow, conventional models and measures of the financial market must be developed and deployed. In conjunction with new measures and technologies, an adapted and expanded monetary policy of central banks (Central Bank Digital Currencies/parallel financing) plays a crucial role. In the public sector, the responsible departments and their resources must be reassessed. Numerous new and innovative means of ‘financial engineering’ are already available for this purpose, including possibilities to monitor the flow of funds, ensuring they arrive at the intended destination and do not seep away through illicit channels. Against the background of a growing world population with dwindling land resources and ecological devastation, the financing of sustainable food and agriculture (including forestry to secure the necessary landscape water balance) requires special attention. In addition to promoting respective innovation, the detrimental financial decisions and subsidies for established non-sustainable to environmentally destructive measures must be corrected.
4. Current structures of thought and action often follow outdated patterns. Production paths are convoluted. In the recent past, measures to optimize production have been taken primarily to increase efficiency (i.e. lean, just-in-time, kanban). Negative consequences of prioritizing efficiency over resilience, such as supply bottlenecks, have been exposed by COVID-19. Yet economies of scale are still characterized by a tendency to centralize facilities, especially in production. Currently, a significant technological push is modifying production and assembly as well as manufacturing, though, paradoxically, under a strangely strong adherence to outdated technology. In the automobile sector, for example, the significantly lower number of components in an electric vehicle is perceived as a disadvantage compared to a vehicle with a conventional drive system. One reason is the fear of killing jobs. These job losses

should rather be regarded as a societal advantage since they will be effectively compensated by creating jobs in socially necessary areas and will strengthen the flexibility of the job market. Individual economic sectors (e.g. construction), still do not exploit the full potential of digitalization. As well as improving the processes, the objects to be created as well as future scenarios could be modelled in advance (e.g. Building Information Modeling), thus helping to select appropriate technology. Digital communication in the working world should also be included in this area. The current shift of working and living environments into the virtual space provides ample opportunities for technical/logistical digitization. For this purpose, appropriate education and training must be provided; this affects the traditional rural professions in particular.

5. The German Supply Chain Act (LkSG) from 2021 focusses on attaining the social and humane conditions in the different stages of production. However, climate protection and the environment are not taken into account. Sustainability in the production of raw materials, semi-finished and final products should be the focus instead, including transportation along the supply chains. Currently, most freight traffic – especially on the road – transports raw and auxiliary materials as well as semi-finished products between business locations. Famously mapped in the 1990s, the world journey of the contents of a cup of strawberry yoghurt has barely changed. Decentralizing production would reduce traffic and its associated energy consumption significantly. In production plants, 3D printers have become an established part of the equipment, almost regardless of the processed material. In assembly and manufacturing, tasks are increasingly performed by automated systems. These transformations mean that efficient production facilities can be installed and operated decentrally in the future. In addition, decentralization strengthens the resilience of the overall production system in the event of failing individual components.
6. Comprehensive initiatives that aim to root the content and structural elements of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) firmly in all areas of education have existed for a long time. This process must be advanced steadily. People, and not the mere transfer of knowledge as an end in itself, must be the focus. They must understand and comprehend their immediate interconnectedness with Nature and the environment. Therefore, ESD goes beyond addressing sustainability topics in class. In addition to systemic knowledge about and a multi-perspective view of human-environment interactions, learners of all ages must acquire design competence. This includes not only cognitive, but social and emotional aspects, such as conflict communication, planning competence, and empathy skills. In promoting these competencies, appropriate methods play an important role. In many areas, the path to future sustainable development is unclear, hardly tangible and often fraught with fears. Therefore, psychological insights must be used to promote resilience and self-efficacy among learners. Differentiated problem awareness of global interdependencies

together with “Gestaltungskompetenz” [design competence] enables future-oriented thinking in the interest of responsible and courageous action. To this end, the implementation of the lessons learned practically, the learners must be addressed on an emotional level. The whole-institution approach, if pursued by educational institutions, proves an effective and credible measure. It presents the institutions, e.g. schools and universities, as positive, tangible examples of successful sustainable development and inspires the learner’s own actions. Up to now, however, educational actors lack the necessary preparation to exploit the full potential of education for sustainable development. For its broad, structural implementation, training and continued education of multipliers in all educational sectors are required.

Post-Scriptum

Sustainability is – in our opinion – not a discipline but a mindset. It should be considered a basic framework condition for any human activity and is therefore required in all social spheres. There is no such thing as a specifiable concept of sustainability that would be equally and globally definable and schematically applicable. Its definition depends on the respective field of action, but is also contingent on country, culture, and society.

It is said that sustainability must be implemented for the sake of our children and grandchildren. They are the ones who can and should live in a world worth living in. Who would want to contradict such a statement? Nevertheless, does this claim not also apply to ourselves? Therefore, let us start right now, so that we can get something out of the respective improvements, as well.

Sustainability is “The Art of Dealing wisely with our Planet Earth” – an active, reflective and courageous duty of care to preserve and promote Planetary Health.

Authors (in alphabetical order)

Bauer, Werner; Beckmann, Jürgen; Blien, Uwe; Brunnhuber, Stefan; Dewilde, Patrick; Fröhling, Magnus; Grambow, Martin; Habel, Jan-Christian; Hemmer, Ingrid; Keilmann-Gondhalekar, Daphne; Lang, Eva; Liedl, Petra; Limmer, Agnes; Makarieva, Anastassia; Mauser, Wolfram; Nefiodov, Andrei; Oexle, Konrad; Rammig, Anja; Rau, Henrike; Schreurs, Miranda; Settele, Josef; Steger, Martin; Stöckl-Bauer, Katharina; von Hauff, Michael; Wernecke, Jörg-Wilhelm.

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IESP e.V. International Expert Network for Earth System Preservation
c/o TUM Institute for Advanced Study, Lichtenbergstr. 2 a, 85478 Garching, Germany
Contact: iesp@ias.tum.de, +49 89 289 10584

Members of the Executive Board in the sense of § 26 BGB (authorized to represent individually): Michael von Hauff, Wolfram Mauser, Jörg Drewes, Martin Steger, Klaus Mainzer (ex officio)
Seat of the association: Munich; Registergericht: Local court Munich, VR 17886

Bank details: IBAN DE59 7115 2570 0012 2443 98, BIC BYLADEM1MIB, KSK Miesbach-Tegernsee